The United States and Pakistan: Navigating a Complex Relationship: Danielle Pletka Prepared Testimony

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Pakistan is probably one of the most dangerous places in the world. It has teetered between quasi-democracy and autocracy for decades, is home to a significant stock of nuclear weapons, has gone to war three times with its nuclear armed neighbor, and has a small but committed minority of extremists bent on killing the Pakistani President and taking over the country.The United States government is reluctant to dwell on Pakistan's parlous state, but we do our friends in the Pakistani government no service with our reticence. This is a country which is home to many senior al Qaeda officials, including possibly Osama bin Laden and former Taliban leader Mullah Omar. It is, increasingly, a headquarters for terror traffic into Afghanistan. And of course, it is a nation that until recently honored its most senior nuclear scientist, AQ Khan, named its main nuclear research laboratories for him, and likely looked away as he proliferated nuclear technology to the world's rogue states. These are problems that need to be faced, and resolved. In addition to the political and security problems, socially, Pakistan is in dire straits. Until its most recent budget, Pakistan was one of only 12 nations that spend less than 2% of GNP on education. The average boy and girl receive negligible schooling, no more than five years. Many Pakistani children never go to school, and as a result, few will learn to read or write. Pakistan rivals sub-Saharan Africa in the poor quality of its care for its young. Pakistan's school system itself is so corrupt and so broken that the alternative schooling offered by madrassas -- some of which teach unbridled Islamic extremism - is appealing to the poor. But the public school system itself has until recently embraced a curriculum not unlike that of the madrassas. Pakistan has recently contracted out for work on a new curriculum.US assistance has made education reform a priority in Pakistan, and there should be little doubt in our minds that most Pakistani leaders are at least nominally committed to those reforms. The question is: are they committed enough? This month, Pakistan's annual federal budget upped allocations for public sector development 35 percent over the previous year; it also upped defense spending by 15 percent. Outside observers and NGOs report little progress in closing down or registering madrassas. Some observers insist the social, economic and political situation is improving in Pakistan. If that is indeed the case, it is fair to insist that those improvements need to move faster.U.S. assistance will top $600 million this year. Half of that money will go for social sector reforms and improvements (health and education), and half will go for foreign military financing. The aid has been criticized as being out of balance, with too much going for budgetary support and for the military.Frankly, it is easy to sit and Monday morning quarterback US assistance to Pakistan. But at the end of the day, arguments against providing this assistance or for ignoring the security component and devoting most aid to health and education do not make sense. In an ideal world, the concept is appealing. In the real world it does not work. Pakistan needs to improve its social sector and it needs a military that can suppress extremists. For all its many flaws - and they are many indeed - Pakistan has proven itself an important ally to the United States in the war on terror. Pakistan's cooperation has meant that senior al Qaeda officials are in custody. It has also meant significant disruption to al Qaeda's plans to attack western targets. Let us be unequivocal: We cannot do without Pakistan's cooperation. We do not want Pakistan to fail, because failure is worse than the status quo.Where the United States goes wrong is where we have gone wrong for more than two decades: We have allowed Pakistan to have it both ways. In the 1980s, Pakistan was an important (though ultimately self-serving) ally in the war on the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Because they were helping, we ignored their dictatorship, their cozy ties with Islamic extremists and their pursuit of nuclear weapons. It was only after the victory in Afghanistan that it was safe to jettison Pakistan, which the United States did for more than a decade. In those years from 1990-2001, it was possible for the United States to do much more to work with Pakistan against proliferation and against the mounting extremism of the region. Not enough was done. Pakistan went from being too important to antagonize to too unimportant to care. It was in those years that AQ Khan flourished and the Taliban was created.The pendulum swung the other way, and September 11, 2001 brought new imperatives to our relationship. And once again we are making the mistake of allowing Pakistan to have it both ways - to maintain a friendship with us on the war on terror while at the same time perfecting its nuclear expertise, stifling democracy, women's rights, religious freedom and more. For as long as the United States continues to gloss over Pakistan's failure to move quickly on reforms, and remains reluctant to confront the government for its willingness to protect AQ Khan, it is making a mistake. For as long as Pakistan fights international terrorists and allows domestic extremists to run free, neither state's interests will be served. A moderate, Muslim success story in Pakistan is possible. But the necessary reforms will not take place without constant pressure and frank talk from the United States.